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ABSTRACT

This programmed text for self-study provides information on assertive communication in business. Part of a series of such texts, the book presents examples of familiar work situations involving interpersonal problems. The text then discusses each of the answers and explains why one or the other is appropriate for communicating assertively. Some of the topics covered in the book's situations include body language, active listening, facial expressions, communicating feelings, communicating responsibly, "I-messages," and communicating a decision when other less stringent methods have not worked. The text is illustrated with cartoon drawings. (KC)

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR CAREER SUCCESS
A Programmed Textbook

Book II: Assertive Communication

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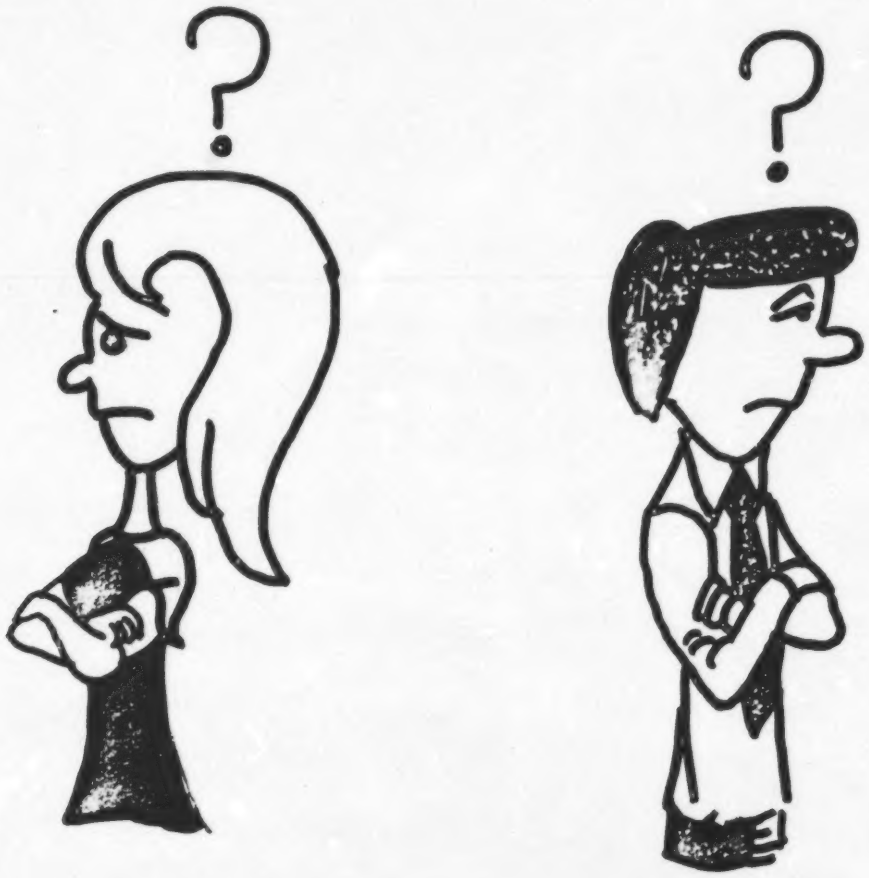
So far you have learned that the skills of active listening insure that we are effectively receiving communication from others. Our attending and empathic responding behaviors are especially helpful to people at work who have problems, or who otherwise have a need to express their feelings about something. These skills communicate both our acceptance and understanding of them and their situation.

There are many times, however, when we need to communicate to others how we feel about a problem we may be having on the job. Remember that wherever we work or whatever our job may be, we will experience problems at one time or another. When we do have problems at work, when we are confronted with situations which we want to prevent from becoming problems, or when we simply want to express our feelings or desires, we need others to understand us. We want others to listen to us.

Ironically, many times the problems we have at work stem from, or worsen as a result of, our inability to express our feelings clearly or to communicate our needs to other people. And, many times the ways in which we do communicate our thoughts, feelings, or needs seem to aggravate situations at work, turning these circumstances into problems when there may not have been problems before.

Now please turn to page 91.

Stop now and think about <u>your</u> work experience for a moment: have you ever been in this kind of situation? Imagine that you are having a problem with a co-worker, resulting in your having some very uncomfortable feelings. You know that you must do or say something to that person--otherwise your situation will become worse. And yet, confronting that person with the problem is likely to make matters worse, too. What can be done about this double bind you find yourself in? Turn to page 92 to find out!



Resolving--and avoiding--this kind of disconcerting doublebind depends upon our ability to send communication effectively. When we need to communicate our thoughts, feelings, or needs at work, our ability to send these messages effectively will determine how accurately we are understood and how completely our needs are met. If we are NOT effective in sending messages, then not only will our job-related needs be likely to remain unfilled, but we may also feel closed-in, stifled, anxious, and even angry from not being understood by our co-workers.

Generally, there are three basic styles in sending messages to others about our thoughts, feelings, and needs: being passive or indirect; being aggressive; and being assertive. Although each of us uses all of these approaches in sending messages at one time or another, we all tend to adopt one of these general styles in expressing our thoughts, feelings, and needs on the job. Each of these different styles of sending messages has different effects on the person to whom we are communicating, and, in large measure, determine how accurately we will be understood and how completely our needs will be met.

Turn now to page 93 for an exercise that will help you learn more about these general styles of sending messages and to help you identify the style that you normally use on the job.

In this exercise we will describe a situation which is common to just about everybody's work experience, followed by three ways in which you might choose to respond. Select the response that you would most characteristically use in the situation from among the choices provided on the next page. Then turn to the page indicated by each response to learn what effect that response would be likely to have on the other person in terms of your being understood and in having your needs met. After selecting your response, go back and examine the other responses before continuing the program on page 98.

The Situation:

You and your spouse have been planning to participate in an important social engagement for several weeks and you have been very much looking forward to the event. The day of the party has finally arrived and all day on the job you have anticipated leaving immediately after work to prepare for it. Toward the latter part of the afternoon, however, you boss tells you that he needs someone to complete a special assignment which will require working a few hours late this particular evening. He asks you to stay late to complete the project.

Now turn to page 94 to begin an examination of three different responses to this situation which you might choose.

How would you respond to the situation?

A. You say nothing and silently give in to his request, resenting him for messing up your plans. Or, perhaps you agree to his request and make a sarcastic comment like, "Well, okay...but it sure would be nice if people around here could plan better." Turn to page 95.

B. In a nervous but blunt manner you say something like, "Absolutely NOT! I will not work late tonight--get somebody else to do it," and then you begin to criticize him for not planning more effectively and for taking advantage of you. Turn to page 96.

C. Talking to him in a firm but friendly way, you tell him that you will not be able to stay late to work on the project because of the important party you have planned to attend. Turn to page 97.

*?!@☆
I SHOULD HAVE
SAID SOMETHING!!
*??!@☆

A.....This response does not communicate your feelings, which may be irritation, anger, resentment, or disappointment, nor does it state your needs, which include not working late and attending the party. Since this response doesn't directly or clearly express your feelings or state your needs, it is an example of a passive or indirect style of sending your messages. By your silence, your boss may assume that you don't mind staying late to complete the project. By your sarcastically and indirectly commenting, "It sure would be nice if people around here could plan better," your boss once again has to infer what your feelings and needs are. He may say nothing or he might jump in and take up the argument, which is certain to aggravate your situation. Either way, you'll still have to stay late and work, miss the party, and probably feel a good bit of resentment as well.

Go back now and try another response to the situation on page 94 and continue doing so until you have observed the effects of all three of these different response styles. Then turn to page 98 to continue the program.

I'M NOT WORKING LATE!!!

B.....This is an <u>aggressive</u> way to handle the situation: you got your message across to your boss, all right, but you did so in such a way that he will probably feel attacked. In a sense, you stood up for your rights, but by attacking him you infringed upon his rights. Your criticism of his planning and supervisory abilities is likely to cause him to forget all about his special project and to focus on his building anger with you! While you may initially feel good about your response--you vented your irritation and stated very clearly that you wouldn't work late--you may come back to work the next day and face a new problem. The special assignment will have been completed, but his anger with you will probably have remained.

Go back now and try another response to the situation on page 94 and continue doing so until you have observed the effects of all three different response styles. Then turn to page 98 to continue the program.

I'D RATHER NOT WORK LATE.

C.....This is an assertive way to deal with this situation. This response communicates your needs to your boss (not working late and going to the party) in a direct and clear way--he does not have to guess or infer what your position is in this matter. Additionally, although you have stood up for your rights in the situation, you have done so in such a way that doesn't attack your boss or infringe upon his rights. Responding assertively will not guarantee that your needs will be met or that your thoughts and feelings will be understood. However, by communicating assertively, the chances of these things happening are greatly increased, and your relationship with your boss is likely to improve since you have communicated openly, directly, and clearly.

The purpose of this exercise was to provide you with a general understanding of the three typical styles of expressing feelings and needs, to help you identify the style of sending messages to others which you normally employ, and to help you learn the effects of those messages on others with whom you work. Therefore, before continuing with the program, make sure that you have examined all the responses on pages 95 - 97 and the various effects they have on others. Now turn to page 98 to continue the program.

The previous exercise pointed out that the way in which we communicate our thoughts, feelings, and needs largely determines how accurately we are understood and how completely our needs are met by other people at work. Passive or indirect communication leaves to chance that we will be understood since it requires others to guess how we feel. If we are passive or indirect, then we can only hope that we have been truly heard. By communicating aggressively we may get our message across to others, but we do so in such a way that includes an attack on them. If we are aggressive, our listeners become less likely to try to understand us and more likely to try to defend themselves against us. The most effective way to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and needs to others, therefore, is to send our messages assertively.

Assertive communication requires expressing ourselves directly, responsibly, and clearly. Direct communication involves various assertive behaviors that encourage our listeners both to attend to and respect our messages. Communicating responsibly involves expressing our thoughts, feelings, and needs without attacking our listeners or otherwise infringing on their rights. Communicating clearly involves expressing ourselves in such a way that promotes our listeners' accurate understanding of our thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Now turn to page 99 for a review of the material presented so far.

Before moving on to the skills of sending messages directly, responsibly, and clearly, let's stop for a moment for a review. Choose one answer from among the four listed below that DOES NOT appropriately answer the following question, and then turn to the page indicated next to the answer you selected.

Using the skills of assertive communication is important in expressing our thoughts, feelings, and needs to those with whom we work because:

A. assertive communication skills encourage others to pay attention and listen to us. Turn to the top of page 100.

B. assertive communication skills make sure that others will understand what we mean, how we feel, and what we need. Turn to the bottom of page 100.

C. assertive communication skills allow us to stand up for our right to express ourselves without infringing upon others' rights. Turn to page 101.

D. assertive communication will help us feel better about ourselves. Turn to page 102.

A.....No, this answer is incorrect since the assertive communication skill of expressing ourselves directly will in fact encourage others to pay attention and listen to us. When we need to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and needs to others with whom we work, we need their attention and acceptance--we need them to listen to us. The skills of communicating directly help us to obtain attention and respect for our messages. We shall have more to say about this skill later in this chapter; now turn back to the question on page 99 and try another answer.

B.....Excellent! This is the correct answer to our review question. No matter how clearly we express ourselves to other people we can never guarantee that others will listen to us, understand what we are saying, or meet our needs. By using the skills of assertive communication, we assume responsibility for the messages we send to others and, in doing so, remove their having to infer what our meanings are. We cannot, however, assume responsibility for their behaviors. As we communicate assertively, we try to express ourselves as clearly and as accurately as possible. While we may encourage others' understanding of our meanings, we can never control their active listening behaviors.

Now turn to page 103 to begin learning about the first assertive communication skill--expressing ourselves directly.

C.....No, this answer is incorrect. The assertive communication skill of expressing ourselves <u>responsibly</u> does, in fact, allow us to exercise our right to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and needs without attacking other people, or otherwise infringing upon their rights. The goal of assertive communication is to meet our needs and express our feelings, but not at the expense of other people. The skill of expressing ourselves responsibly enables us to say what we mean and to ask for what we need and, at the same time, maintain open and productive working relationships with our employers, co-workers, and customers. We shall have more to say about this skill later in this chapter; now turn back to the question on page 99 and try another answer.

D.....This answer is incorrect. Very clearly, if you are able to encourage others at work to listen to you, to accurately understand you, and to help you meet your job-related needs, you are very likely to feel much better about yourself! Assertive communication skills will not only help you feel better about who you are and where you are going in your work situation, but they will also give you a more positive outlook about your co-workers, your boss, and your job! As you become skilled in expressing what you mean, how you feel, and what you want, the other people with whom you work are likely to become more open and honest with you. The skills of assertive communication, like the skills of active listening, are contagious! Now turn back to the question on page 99 and try another answer.

The assertive communication skill of expressing ourselves directly encourages others to pay close attention to and respect our messages. Selecting the right words to describe as accurately as possible what we mean, how we feel, and what we need are clearly very important. However, expressing ourselves directly also involves the same physical attending behaviors, which spell the word FACES, that you learned in Book I concerning active listening. Are you surprised? You'll remember that the FACES behaviors nonverbally communicate to the other person that you intend to be open and involved with him or her. The attitudes of openness and involvement conveyed by these behaviors encourage both you and your co-workers to communicate in more meaningful ways, regardless of who is the listener and who is the assertive communicator. Let's review these FACES behaviors and then see how each of these behaviors relates to expressing ourselves directly.

F...A...C...E...S

F.....Face the person squarely.

A.....Approach by leaning slightly toward the person.

C.....Compose yourself in this posture.

E.....Establish eye contact with the person.

S.....Space yourself at a proper distance from the person.

Turn now to page 104.

F.....Face the other person squarely and openly. Hold your head erect. This posture nonverbally conveys to the other person that you intend to be direct with him or her; that you intend to express exactly what you mean, how you feel, and what you need. This posture also communicates to your co-workers that you have confidence in yourself and in the messages you are sending. If you turn your body away from the other person, you are likely to contribute to his or her feeling that you are withholding part of yourself, and he or she will have to guess what is really on your mind. By facing the other person squarely and openly, you will communicate that you are going to be confident, candid, and honest in what you say.

Now turn to page 105.

A.....Approach by leaning slightly toward the person. This is a non-defensive posture which communicates your intentions to become involved with the other person--to share part of yourself openly. Leaning away can signal retreat and a passive or indirect style. Leaning forward too vigorously, or "button-holding" your co-workers, is likely to convey an aggressive and threatening manner. Crossing your arms or your legs, or slouching as you express yourself, may communicate that you may be either suspicious of disclosing your thoughts and feelings, or disinterested in your own messages; neither behavior encourages the other person to listen attentively. Adopting a posture which positions you in a slightly approaching manner communicates your willingness to be open and involved in sharing your thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Now turn to page 106.

C.....Compose yourself in this posture; relax in this position. Your composure will communicate to the other person that you are "at home" with disclosing part of yourself--that you are willing to trust the other person with your thoughts, feelings, and needs. Adopting the FACES behaviors too rigidly signals your lack of comfort and trust and will not encourage the other person to listen closely to you. Similarly, too much relaxation may convey boredom or disinterest in your own messages, therefore discouraging the other person from paying close attention to you.

Now turn to page 107.

E.....Establish eye contact with the person. A proper balance of length, intensity, and frequency of your eye contact communicates your intentions to be open and direct with the other person. If you look directly, without staring the other person down, he or she will become more likely to listen and respect what you are saying. Averting your eyes from others tends to communicate that you have little confidence in yourself or in what you are saying. Establishing effective eye contact communicates both your sincerity and your willingness to be direct in your expression of your thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Now turn to page 108.

S.....Space yourself at a proper distance from the person. The distance which you establish between yourself and the person to whom you are communicating signals the degree of closeness you intend to allow as you disclose part of yourself. Careful observation of the clues the other person provides as he or she listens affords you a chance to adjust the distance between yourself and the other person. By remaining at a distance in excess of five feet, the other person may feel that you do not intend to be particularly open or direct. Approaching your co-workers too closely, less than two feet, for instance, may contribute to their thinking that you intend to be either too intimate or too aggressive.

Now turn to page 109.

?
I'M VERY ANGRY.

You have seen that by employing the nonverbal FACES behaviors you encourage the person to whom you are communicating to pay attention and respect your messages. You can also express yourself directly by using various paraverbal behaviors; remember that paraverbal behaviors are those which involve the way we communicate our messages. Using different gestures to emphasize points you are making is helpful in gaining others' attention. Speaking in an interested, animated voice tone, avoiding monotone rhythms and inflections, and speaking in a forceful, clear voice also contributes to the attention you receive. Finally, insuring that your verbal messages agree with your nonverbal and paraverbal messages is important in encouraging others to listen to you. For example, smiling while you are saying that you are angry is not likely to cause another to understand what your message really is; again, he or she will have to guess how you are really feeling.

Now please turn to page 110.

Let's stop at this point for a review of the material concerning expressing ourselves directly. Answer "True" or "False" to the statement printed below and turn to the page indicated.

> Expressing yourself directly, so as to encourage others to attend to and respect your messages, depends upon your ability to choose the words which describe exactly what you mean, how you feel, and what you need.
>
> True.....Turn to the top of page 111.
>
> False.....Turn to the bottom of page 111.

True. This answer is incorrect--perhaps you didn't read the review question carefully. Selecting the best words to describe as accurately as possible what we mean, how we feel, and what we need is important. But we can go a long way in encouraging our co-workers to attend to, respect, and understand our messages simply by adopting the nonverbal and paraverbal FACES behaviors. Read the question on page 110 again and try the other answer.

False. Right! You have developed a clear understanding of how important the nonverbal and paraverbal FACES behaviors are in encouraging others to pay attention and listen to our messages. While the words we select are important in helping others to understand us, gaining their attention and encouraging them to listen to us depends in large part upon the behaviors we exhibit while we speak.

Now turn to page 112 to learn about the second skill of assertive communication, expressing ourselves responsibly.

You'll remember that expressing ourselves responsibly allows us to exercise our right to communicate thoughts, feelings, and needs without attacking other people, or otherwise infringing upon their rights. Being responsible in communication means first to assume ownership for our inner conditions (our thoughts, feelings, and needs) and second, to share this condition with another in such a way as to retain ownership of the message.

For example, suppose that a co-worker just harshly criticized you for an error that you made on an assignment. Although you did make the mistake, you are annoyed by the abusive manner in which you were criticized.

> You might respond to him, "You have no right to criticize me--you make a lot of mistakes, too. You are so darn petty."
>
> Or, you might say, "Yes, I did make that error and I'm glad that you helped me discover it. However, I'm annoyed by your abusive words."

Turn now to page 113 for a closer look at these two different statements.

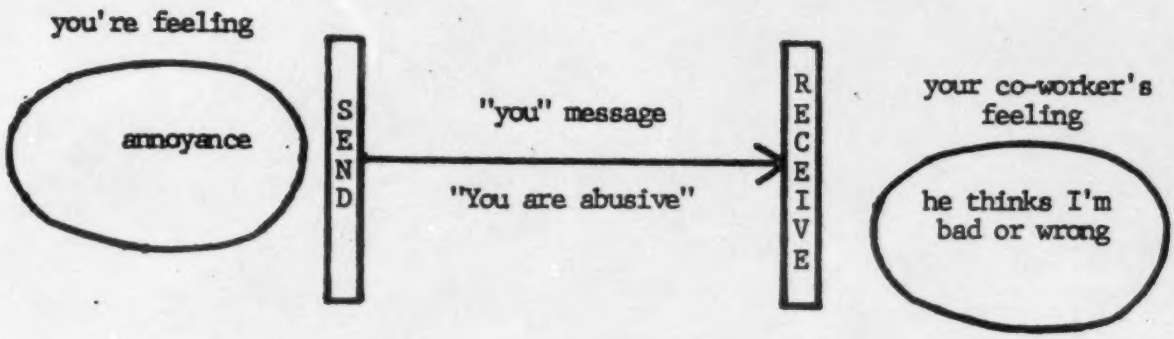
The first response used "you" messages entirely: "You have no right... you make mistakes, too...you are petty..." Your co-worker will probably see from your nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors that you are angry with him (whether or not he is an effective active listener--he may just "sense" your annoyance) but your verbal messages only attack him. All he can be sure of is that you seem to think that he's a pretty bad person, a thought that isn't likely to encourage him to listen to your real message--that you are annoyed with the manner in which he has criticized you. By sending only "you" messages, you did not responsibly express yourself; neither did you assume ownership of your feelings of annoyance or refrain from attacking him in your message.

The second response on page 112 employed "I" messages: "I'm annoyed with you." Your co-worker can now clearly see where you are coming from in the situation. He or she does not have to guess what your feelings are because you have responsibly expressed them by using "I" messages. Additionally, you have assumed ownership of your feelings, and in doing so, you have not attacked him. He is much more likely now to understand not only that you are annoyed with him but also exactly which of his behaviors are contributing to your having that feeling.

Turn now to page 114 for an even closer look at the difference between "I" messages and "you" messages in expressing ourselves responsibly.

It may be helpful for you in understanding the differences between "you" messages and "I" messages to diagram the effect these messages have on others. We'll use the same example of your co-worker harshly criticizing you for an error you made on an assignment in our diagram.

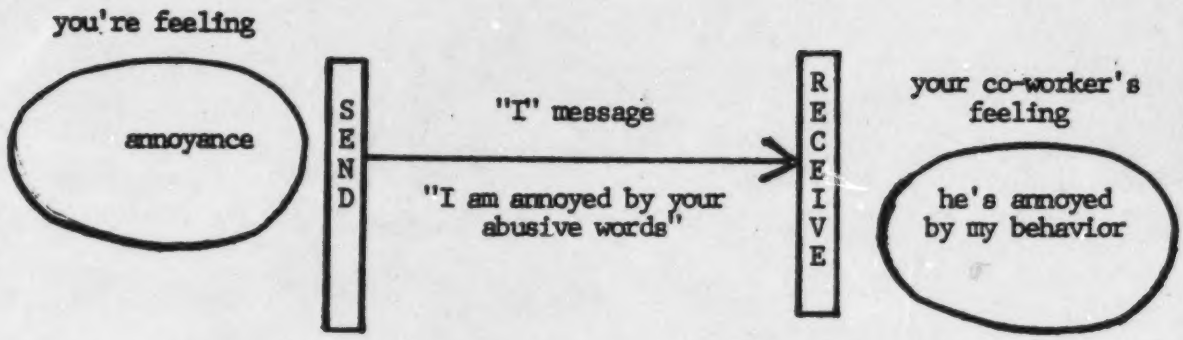
Sending a "you" message may be diagrammed as:



Note that your co-worker doesn't understand how you feel; he is only aware that you have, in a sense, attacked him--even though he may have a good reason to confront you about your error. Additionally, friction may build in your relationship as a result, making future communication between you and your co-worker even more difficult.

Now turn to page 115.

Now let's take a look how the "I" message would be diagrammed:



Note that by using the "I" message your co-worker <u>does</u> understand accurately how you feel. Since you owned the annoyance by using the "I" message he is not likely to feel attacked; he is likely to attempt to find out more about his annoying behavior. At this point you may find it necessary to shift into an active listening mode: your co-worker may want to tell you how <u>he</u> is thinking or feeling. In moving between the skills of assertive communication and active listening, the chances of strengthening your working relationship with your co-worker are greatly increased.

Now turn to page 116.

Before we provide you with some practice exercises to help you learn how to formulate effective "I" messages, a review of the material presented to this point may be beneficial. Choose from among the four statements listed below the one which best answers the following question, and then turn to the page indicated to see how you did.

"I" messages are more effective than "you" messages in expressing ourselves responsibly because:

A. "I" messages are more likely to encourage constructive change in the person with whom we are communicating. Turn to the top of page 117.

B. "I" messages contain very little negative evaluation of the person to whom we are communicating. Turn to the bottom of page 117.

C. "I" messages help our working relationships become more open and more productive. Turn to the top of page 118.

D. All of the above answers are correct. Turn to the bottom of page 118.

A.....You are very perceptive in realizing that "I" messages encourage others to feel less threatened when we need to discuss the negative effect their behavior has on us. Therefore, the use of effective "I" messages is more likely to promote constructive change in our co-workers. However, this is not the whole story. Go back to the question on page 116 and try another answer.

B.....You are sensitive to the fact that effective "I" messages minimize our communicating threatening evaluations to others which, in turn, make them more likely to be open and receptive to our messages. However, "I" messages may stimulate feelings in them which will make it necessary to shift back to the mode of active listening. In any event, while you are correct in realizing that using "I" messages means expressing ourselves more responsibly, without attacking others, this is not the whole story. Go back to the question on page 116 and try another answer.

C.....You seem to have a clear understanding that using "I" messages builds our working relationships. Assuming ownership of our thoughts, feelings, and needs, and expressing ourselves responsibly, does enhance our relationships with our co-workers. This, however, is not the whole story. Go back to the question on page 116 and try another answer.

D.....Terrific! You clearly understand that the use of "I" messages accomplishes three very important things in our relationships at work:

1. by not attacking those whose behaviors have a negative influence on us at work, we are more likely to promote their changing constructively.
2. by owning our feelings and expressing them responsibly, we minimize communicating negative evaluations to our co-workers, encouraging them to be more receptive to our messages.
3. by assuming ownership of our thoughts, feelings, and needs, and expressing ourselves responsibly, we become more open and direct in our communication with our co-workers, encouraging them to do likewise.

Now turn to page 119 for another review question.

WHEN I FIND I CAN'T TRUST CERTAIN TROUBLESOME PEOPLE IN THIS OFFICE, I JUST HAVE TO SCREAM!!

For our second review question of the material covered so far, answer "true" or "false" to the statement printed below, and then turn to the page indicated to find out how you did.

The following statement is an effective "I" message:
"...when I find that I can't trust certain troublesome people in this office, I just have to scream..."

True.....turn to page 120.

False.....turn to page 121.

True. No, this answer is incorrect, although the question is a difficult one. Let's look at the statement. Although this person did use "I" statements throughout his message, he did not really "own" his feelings. Instead, he communicated that he was a "victim" of certain troublesome people, and that he had no control of his having to scream. Additionally, our speaker has not focused on his feelings--he has focused instead on a negative evaluation of unknown persons in the office who are both troublesome and betrayers of his trust.

Secondly, the person to whom our speaker is talking doesn't really know who or what our speaker is upset about. If, for example, that person feels as though he may be that "troublesome person," then he is likely to feel threatened and respond, "What do you mean you can't trust me?" In a sense, our speaker has been indirect in his aggression toward an unknown person; he has certainly not communicated assertively. If our speaker does have a problem with the person to whom he is talking, then he should assertively confront that person with effective "I" messages.

Go back to our question on page 119 and try the other answer.

False. Very good! You have correctly realized that merely using the word "I" in our messages to others does not guarantee that we are expressing ourselves responsibly. In this illustration our speaker has not owned or focused on his feelings in his message. Instead, he is coming across as a "victim" of certain people in the office. He is also communicating in a hostile and evaluative manner, neither of which will encourage the person to whom he is talking to listen, understand, or respect his message.

Had our speaker assumed ownership of his feelings and communicated assertively he might have directly confronted the person in the office with whom he had a problem and say, "I am angry with you because I think you have betrayed my trust when you divulged the secret about the new project." Instead, our speaker is being indirect in his evaluative aggression toward some unknown person in the office and is not communicating assertively.

Now turn to page 122 to learn how you can formulate effective "I" messages in your assertive communication with others.

You have seen that merely using an "I" instead of a "you" in your communication with others at work does not guarantee that you are expressing yourself responsibily--or assertively. "I" messages will be effective only insofar as they clearly communicate to the other person that you are assuming responsibility for and ownership of your thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Expressing yourself clearly, then, is the final key in communicating assertively with others at work. You will remember from the section concerning active listening that very often there are thoughts or feelings lingering behind the messages people communicate to one another. The task of the effective listener is to help the other person express those intended meanings. Communicating clearly involves the skills of making your intended meanings and your expressed communication to others as identical as possible. By clearly expressing yourself, you will not leave to chance that you will be understood by others. In short, by communicating clearly with others you insure that "what I am feeling is what I express to other people."

Before we move on to the skills involved in expressing yourself clearly, turn to page 123 for an illustration of the importance of this skill.

Suppose that you and a co-worker were jointly assigned a project by your boss several weeks ago. You are mutually responsible for the project and completing it properly depends upon your working together. The deadline for the assignment is only two weeks away. Your co-worker, however, has missed the two previous meetings which were scheduled for your joint effort and he has said very little about the project for several days. You are feeling both frustrated by his apparent lack of effort and worried that you will not be able meet the deadline. You approach your co-worker by saying, "I am annoyed with you because you haven't said anything about our project for several days and because you have missed our last two meetings. I'm becoming worried about our being able to finish before the deadline arrives."

How do you think your co-worker is likely to respond to your statement? Choose the answer you think is best and turn to the page indicated.

A. He is likely to really listen to and understand what you are saying. Turn to page 124.

B. He is likely to spend more time defending himself than listening to or understanding your feelings and needs because you have criticized him. Turn to page 125.

A. Very good! This is the correct answer. In your response you have both used an effective "I" message and expressed yourself clearly. You have told him how you feel (annoyed and worried), you have explained to him without attacking him what he is doing to contribute to your having those feelings (missing the meetings and avoiding talking about the project), and you have explained to him what you see as the consequences of his behaviors to you if he continues (not meeting the deadline). He does not have to guess where you stand on the matter. While you cannot guarantee that he has completely understood your feelings and your needs, you have taken the responsibility for how you feel by using an effective "I" message.

At this point in your conversation your co-worker will probably need to tell you how he feels. For example, he may be having problems at home that are getting in the way of his working effectively or he may feel overwhelmed and unconfident with his part of the assignment. However, by communicating assertively with him you have encouraged him not only to listen to and understand your messages, but you have also encouraged him to be open and direct with his thoughts, feelings, and needs. Therefore, your shifting to an active listening mode at this point in your conversation will allow your co-worker to express himself directly and clearly to you, open the lines of communication between you, and strengthen your working relationship.

Now turn to page 126 to learn how you can develop your skills of expressing yourself clearly.

B. This answer is incorrect, although your co-worker may in fact feel that he must defend himself. In your message to him you have told him exactly how you feel, what he is doing that contributes to your having those feelings, and what you see as the consequences to you if he continues his behavior. Since you have used an effective "I" message and have expressed yourself clearly, he is likely to gain an accurate understanding of your feelings and your needs concerning the project.

Even though you have assumed ownership of your feelings and responsibility for your communication, your co-worker may feel a need to defend himself; his defense, however, is likely not to be a reaction to your attacking him but a need to express his feelings. At this point in your conversation you will probably need to shift to an active listening mode to help him get his messages across to you.

Had you said to your co-worker, "you're not doing anything on this project; you are really frustrating me! You're going to have to really get hot!" then he would have felt attacked by "you" messages. The defense he would have used in this case would have not been to explain to you his real feelings, but to counter your attack on him.

Before moving on to page 126 to learn how you can develop your skills of expressing yourself clearly, turn back to the question on page 123 and examine the other answer.

Perhaps the best way to begin developing your skill of expressing yourself clearly is by learning the "ABC's" of assertive communication. Let's take a look at what each of these letters stands for:

A.....state the Affect, or your feelings, directly to the other person. Just as in the skill of active listening where you identified the feelings of the other person, identify your own feelings and clearly state them to the other person.

B.....state the Behavior of the other person which is contributing to your having those feelings, or which otherwise is unacceptable to you.

C.....state the Consequences to you, as you see them, of the other person's behavior if it continues or remains unchanged.

Turn now to page 127 to see these "ABC's" of assertive communication in action!

Let's use the situation described on page 123 to illustrate the effectiveness of the "ABC's" of assertive communication. Remember that you don't feel that your co-worker is cooperating with you on your joint assignment and you're annoyed with him as a result. You're also worried about meeting a deadline. You said, "I'm annoyed with you because you missed our last two meetings and haven't said anything about our project for several days. And I'm becoming worried about our being able to finish before the deadline arrives."

By breaking this message down to the "ABC's" of assertive communication we find:

A.....state the Affect directly to the other person. In this example you said, "I am annoyed with you and worried about meeting our deadline."

B.....state the Behavior of the other person which is contributing to your having those feelings. In this example you said, "you have missed our last two meetings, and you haven't said anything about our project in several days."

C.....state the Consequences to you of his behaviors. In this example you said, "if things continue as they are we might not be able to meet the deadline."

Now turn to page 128 so that you can try formulating an assertive "ABC" message.

Read the two situations printed below and try formulating an effective "I" message, using the ABC method, that clearly expresses your thoughts, feelings, or needs. Then turn to page 129 to compare your messages to ours.

Situation # 1:

You've just taken over new responsibilities in your department; you feel challenged by the new position but you are having a hard time adapting to the new routine and haven't completely learned all of the facets of your new job. A co-worker who works next to you has been making sarcastic and embarrassing remarks about your being unfamiliar with your new position. For example, she has been saying, "Don't worry, Tom will learn his new job....maybe next year." How would you respond to her, using the ABC method? Compare your response with ours on page 129.

Situation # 2:

When you were hired six months ago you were promised that you would receive a raise after three months of performing your job satisfactorily. You haven't received any raises so far, and yet your boss has praised your work several times. You decide that you must talk to him about it. How would you approach your boss, using the ABC method of assertive communication? Compare your message with ours on page 129.

Situation # 1:

A....."I feel angry...

B.....when you make sarcastic remarks about my unfamiliarity with my new job...

C.....I am already embarrassed about making mistakes and when you tease me I become even more embarrassed, and that makes it even harder to concentrate on my new responsibilities."

Situation # 2:

A....."I am confused and annoyed...

B.....since you haven't given me a raise in the past six months, even though you promised me one after three months if my work was satisfactory...

C.....and I'm beginning to wonder if my work is really good enough to deserve that promised raise."

Well, how did you do? If you had trouble formulating these ABC messages, go back to page 117 to study this assertive communication skill again. If your messages were similar to ours and you had no difficulty in forming an effective ABC message, turn now to page 130 for another exercise concerning ABC messages.

Try one more exercise in formulating effective "ABC" messages. Read the situation printed below and the response which accompanies it. Then answer "True" or "False" to the review question and turn to the page indicated to see how you did.

Situation:

A co-worker, Bob, has an office next to yours and he has a radio there which he plays very loudly all day. The noise makes it very difficult for you to work; you have casually mentioned the problem to him in the past but the situation continues. So, you decide to approach him more firmly in order to correct the situation.

Response:

You say to him, "Bob, when you are playing your radio loudly I find it very hard to concentrate. Right now I'm feeling distracted and I don't want my work to suffer."

True or False:

This is an example of an effective ABC message which states your thoughts, feelings, or needs both responsibly and clearly.

True.....turn to page 131.

False.....turn to page 132.

True. Very good! This is an effective ABC message even though it is not constructed in precisely the same way as previous examples. Yet, the essential elements of an effective ABC message are contained in the response. Let's take a closer look, using the ABC structure:

A....."I'm feeling distracted."

B....."when you play your radio so loudly..."

C....."I find it hard to concentrate and I don't want my work to suffer."

You correctly understand that the structure of the ABC message is not important, so long as the essential A-B-C elements are present. You may have also noticed that our speaker used an effective "I" message and assumed ownership of the feelings of distraction.

Now turn to page 133.

False. No, this answer is incorrect. The message is an effective ABC message even though it is not exactly constructed like the others we've presented in previous examples. Go back to the question on page 130 and try the other answer.

Sometimes, in clearly expressing our thoughts, feelings, and needs, an effective ABC message is not sufficient; sometimes an ABCD message is needed. If a co-worker's problem behavior is repetitive, forming a pattern which persistently results in your having problems, you may need to add a "D" to your basic ABC assertive communication. "D" stands for a Decision that you have made about the other person's behavior.

For example, going back to the situation in which you don't feel that a co-worker is meeting you halfway on a joint project (described on page 123), your Decision message may be, "Unless we can make significant progress very soon, I've decided that I'll have to go to the boss and discuss this problem with him."

Now turn to page 134 for a practice exercise in formulating effective ABCD messages.

Try this exercise in forming effective ABCD messages. Here's the situation: you've been working for a supervisor who has been in your department for only a few months. During that period of time she has dropped many hints that she isn't satisfied with your performance. Your previous boss in this department was extremely pleased with your work and you've been working even harder for this new person. You're becoming exasperated with her indirect manner; you've tried talking with her many times, using your skill of sending effective ABC messages, but with no real results--the situation just gets worse and worse. Finally you've decided to confront her directly about the problem one last time with an ABCD message. You say, "I'm angry because you speak only indirectly with me concerning my performance. If, as a result, I don't know what I'm doing well and what I'm not, then I can see myself really becoming ineffective in my job. Therefore, I've decided:

Choose from among the "D" messages listed below the one you think is most effective and turn to the page indicated.

A. "that unless we can work things out I'll have to write a letter describing my predicament to your supervisor." Turn to page 135.

B. "that I just can't stand it anymore! Something has to give!" Turn to the top of page 136.

C. "that you're just not as capable as my last boss because I was able to deal with her directly." Turn to the bottom of page 136.

A.....Right! This is the most effective "D" message. You have clearly expressed to her your need to resolve the problem. You have indicated your reluctance to go to her supervisor with your complaint, but that unless you and she can work together to improve the situation, such an action on your part will be necessary. Your "D" message in this case is both responsible and clear. At this point you may need to shift back to the mode of active listening. In effect, you have delivered somewhat of a bombshell to her, although you have assumed ownership of your feelings and your needs by communicating responsibly, and have not directly attacked her. Nevertheless, she may have a need to express her feelings at this point in your conversation. Your using the skills of active listening is the most effective way in which you can understand what she needs to say to you.

You'll notice also that there is a certain amount of risk in stating this "D" message: your boss may say to you, "So what...go ahead and write that letter." This possibility points out that "D" messages are appropriate only if the problem behavior has been so repetitive as to make you considerably uncomfortable in the situation, if repeated attempts at using ABC messages have failed, and if your "D" message is, in fact, genuine and not a bluff. Additionally, communicating assertively is a risky business since we are disclosing part of ourselves to others, trusting that they will understand and accept our thoughts, feelings, and needs. Turn now to page 137 for a brief discussion of the risks--and the rewards--of assertive communication.

B.....No, this answer is incorrect since it does not clearly express what your decision is. Surely, some changes will have to be made in your office in order for you to become happier and more productive. But your "D" message does not precisely communicate what you intend or decided to do. Are you going to fight back? Resign? Not worry about it any more? Your boss must now guess what your intentions are, or you must hope that she is an effective active listener. Turn back now to the question on page 134 and try another answer.

C.....No, this answer is incorrect. You have communicated what you think about your boss, but you have done so by using a "you" message. Since you have not expressed yourself responsibly your boss is not very likely to consider changing her indirect manner with you. Instead, she is likely to feel attacked by you and, as a result, become hostile in return. Such a reaction on her part will probably weaken your relationship with her and worsen your situation in the office. An effective "D" message not only clearly communicates your decisions, but also effectively utilizes the sending of "I" messages. Now turn back to the question on page 134 and try another answer.

We have pointed out in the previous example that communicating assertively at work involves a certain risk. By disclosing ourselves openly and honestly we do, in fact, become vulnerable to others. After communicating our thoughts, feelings, or needs openly others may indeed come back to us by saying, "so what," or otherwise respond negatively to our honesty.

The rewards of assertive communication, however, far outweigh the risks. By communicating assertively we afford others the opportunity to see who we really are and what we really need, thereby conveying trust and respect. Expressing ourselves directly, responsibly, and clearly encourages them to pay attention to what we are saying, to really listen to us, and to understand our messages accurately. The skills of assertive communication, like the skills of active listening, are contagious. If we express ourselves directly, responsibly, and clearly our co-workers become more likely to express themselves in a similar manner, thereby paving the way for more open, productive, and satisfying working relationships.

Before continuing with the text on conflict resolution, you may wish to do more exercises in assertive communication. The recorded audio cassette tape will provide additional work in the skills of expressing yourself directly, responsibly, and clearly. Instructions and exercises will be found on the cassette, Side 1, Part 2.